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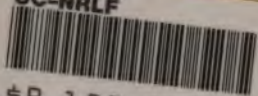
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A PROPHECY AND  
A PLEA



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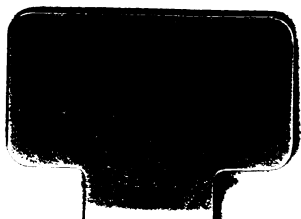
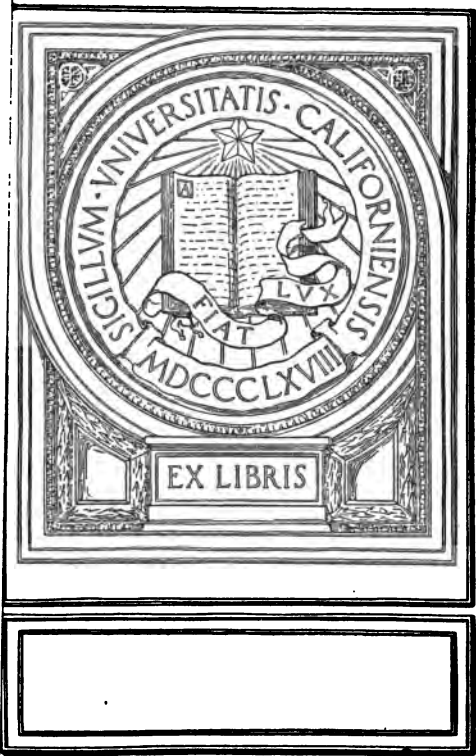
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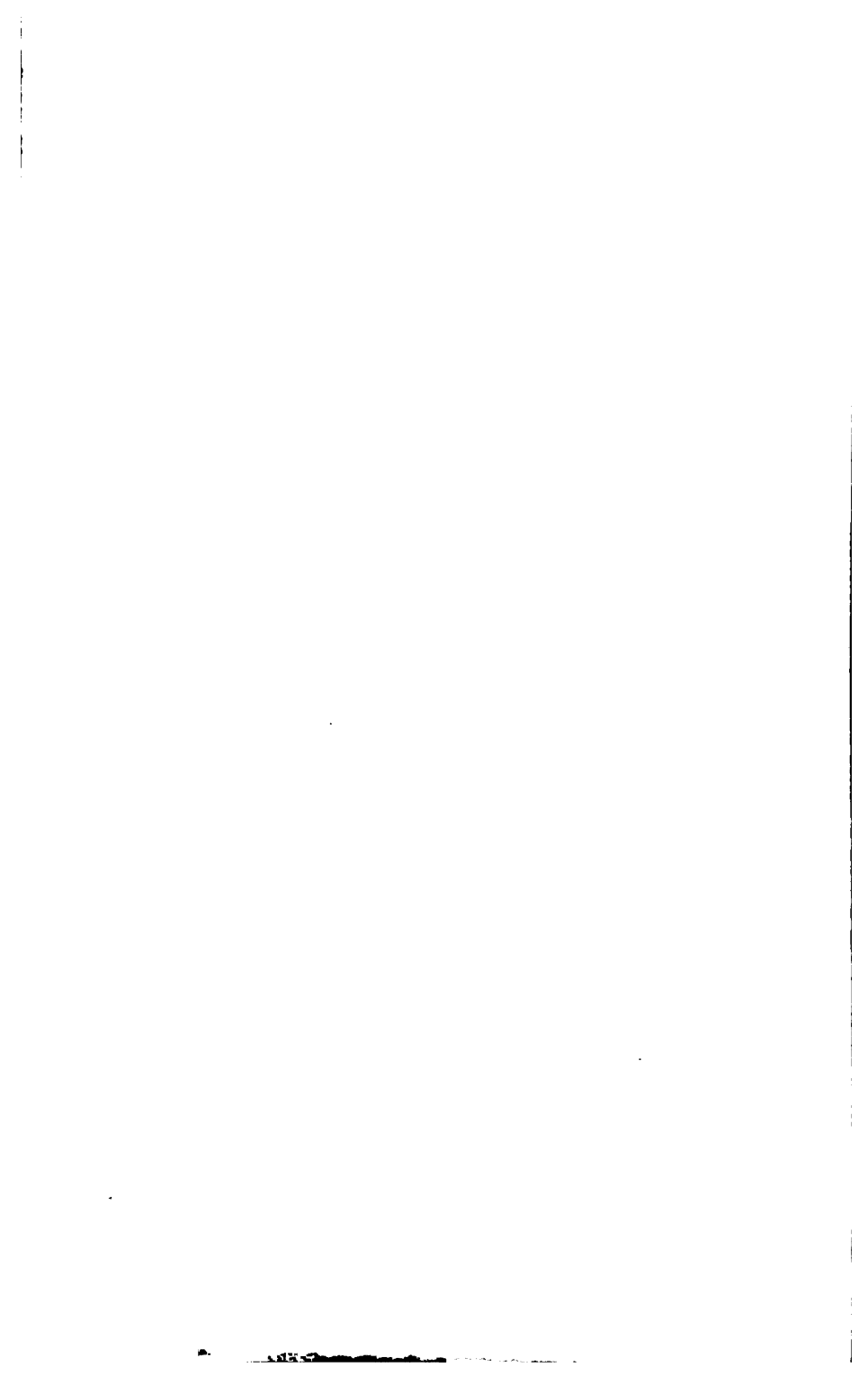
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JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

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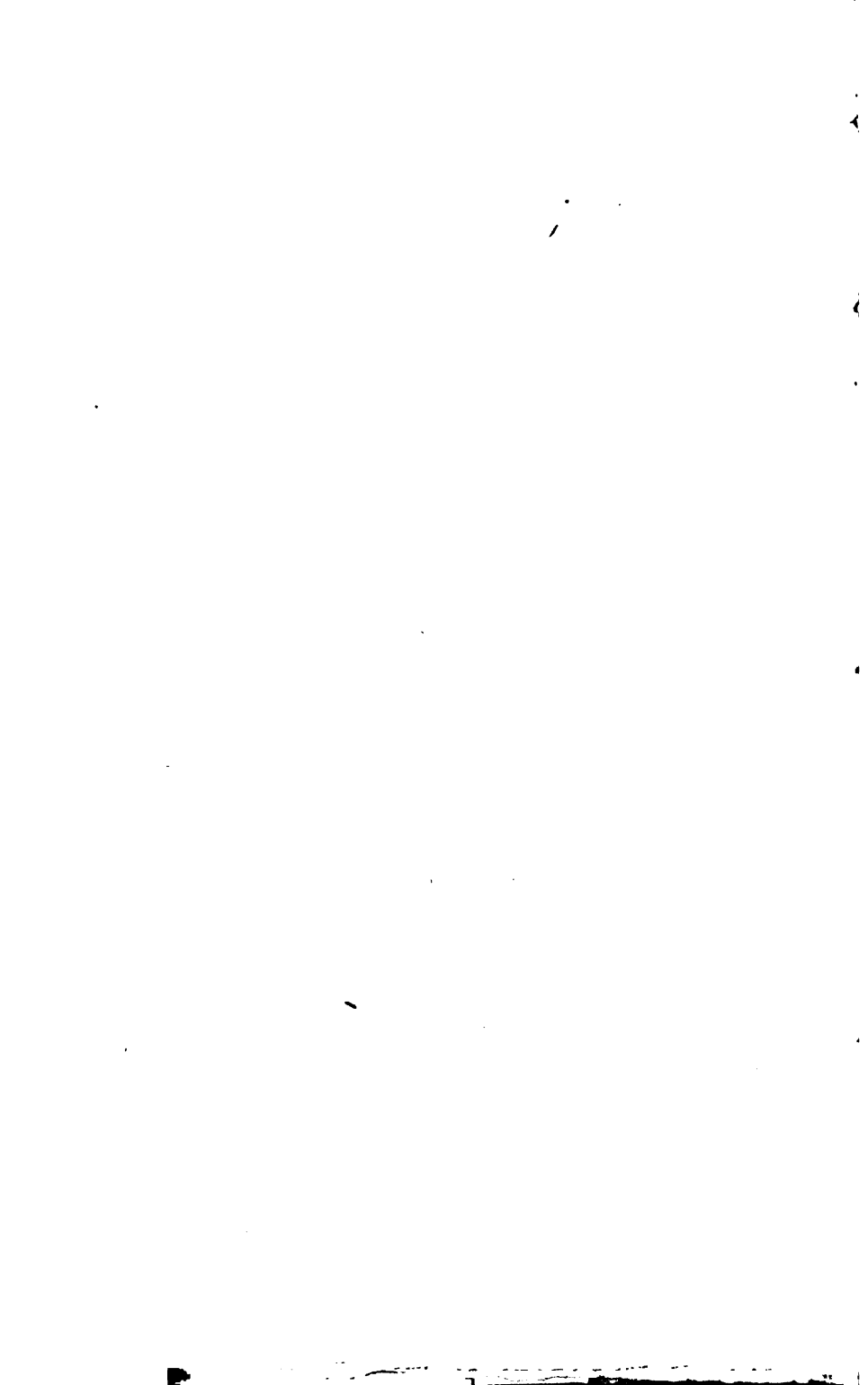






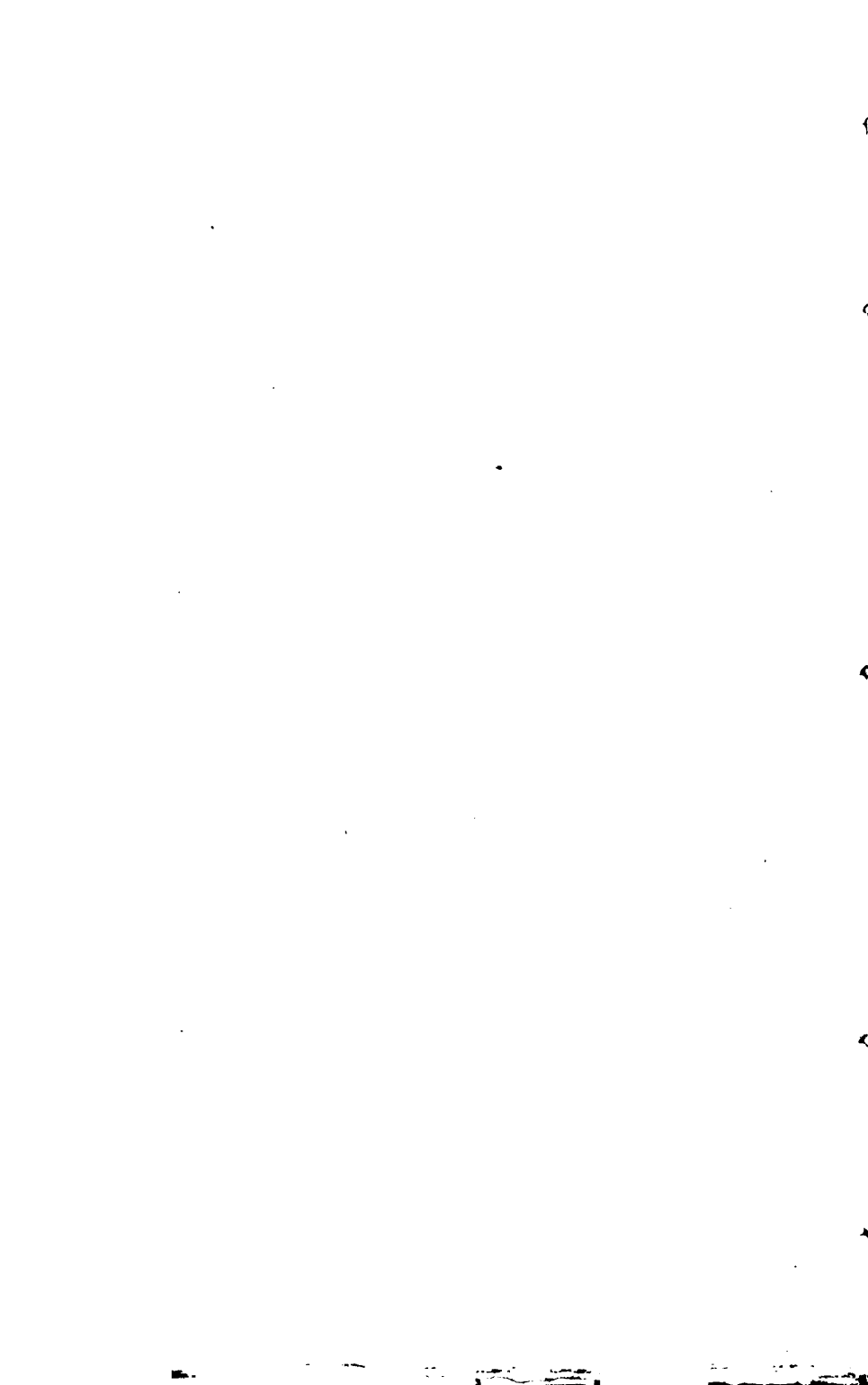
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A PROPHECY AND  
A PLEA





# A PROPHECY AND A PLEA

BEING FIRST A STYGIAN PROPHECY  
AND SECOND A PLEA FOR NATU-  
RALISM . . . TWO POEMS  
READ ON DIVERS  
OCCASIONS

BY  
JOHN KENDRICK BANGS



UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

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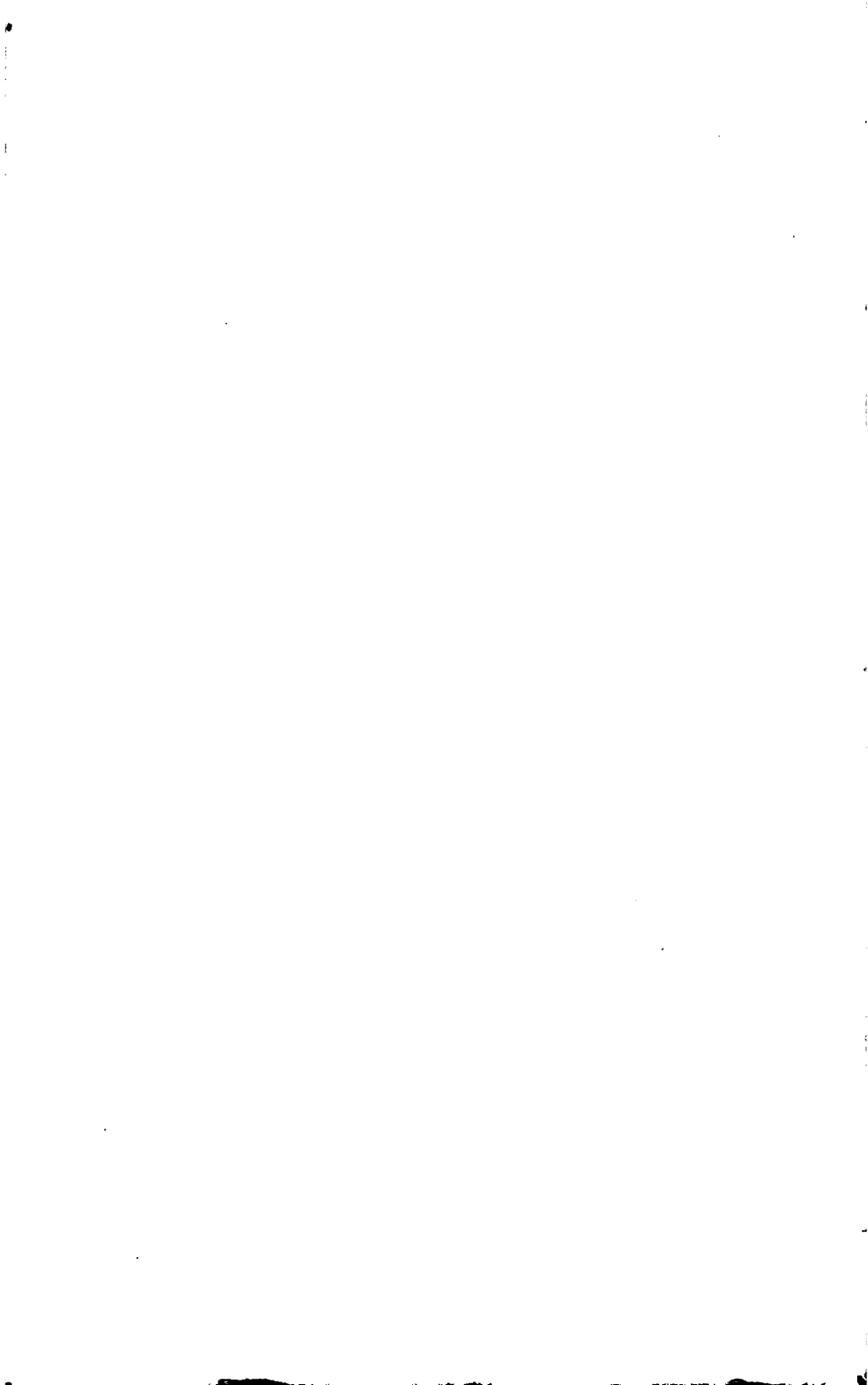


TO VIRI  
ABRO LIAO

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**These**  
**poems were written for and are dedi-**  
**cated to the members Past,**  
**Present and Future of**  
**the Psi Epsilon**  
**Fraternity**

**M149477**



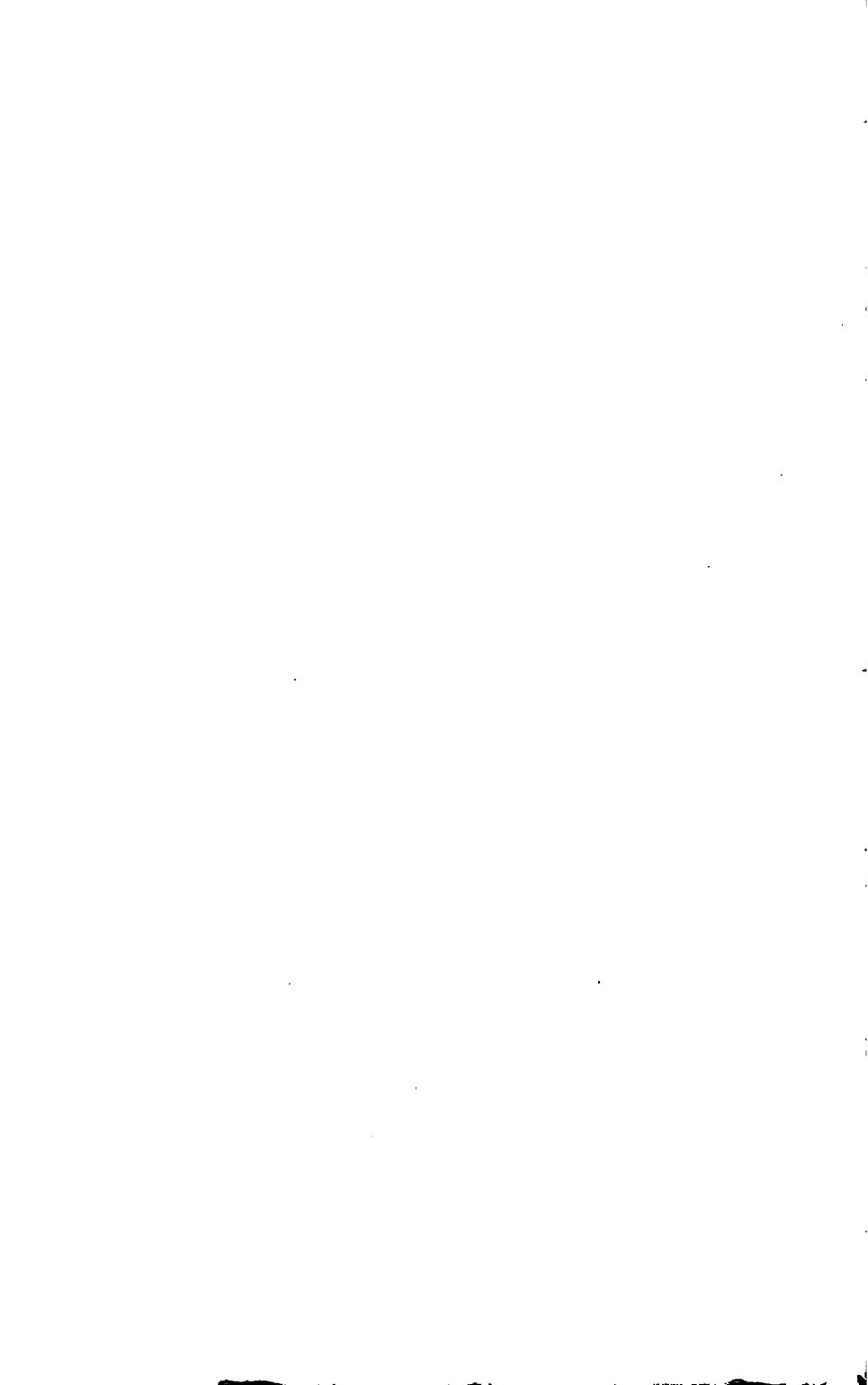
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## A STYGIAN PROPHECY

WRITTEN FOR THE LITERARY EXERCISES  
OF THE PSI UPSILON FRATERNITY  
CONVENTION : MIDDLETOWN  
CONNECTICUT, THURS-  
DAY, MAY THE SIXTH  
M DCCCXCVII



**I**T was midnight on the river, on the  
darkling river Styx,  
As the quaint old boat-man Charon  
paddled up to where I stood,  
And I had to bargain with him to es-  
cape the horrid fix  
I'd got into when I'd ventured through  
the fearful Stygian wood.

TO VIRGIL  
AENEID

A STYGIAN PROPHECY

There were sinful souls about me, men  
too wicked e'en to go  
O'er the inky stream to Hades where  
the furnaces are kept,  
And some shrieked aloud profanely as  
they wandered to and fro,  
While some others on the pier front  
gnashed their spirit teeth and wept.

And although I am not timid as a rule, I  
must admit  
When I thought of how these spirits  
swarming up and down the shore  
Were too vile for them in Hades—if one  
can imagine it—  
All my nerves were in a flutter and my  
heart was sick and sore.

They would potter all about me, they  
would grimace in my face;  
They would terrify my optics and  
they'd horrify my ears:  
I'd have parted with a fortune for a  
chance to leave the place,  
And escape the horrid visions that had  
so aroused my fears.

Now perhaps I should explain it, how I  
happened to be there:  
I was not a finished mortal like those  
other sorry souls,  
I was not a footsore climber of the so-  
called golden stair;  
But had gone by invitation where the  
inky river rolls.

TO VINU  
ABSOLIAO

A STYGIAN PROPHECY

I'd received a note from Boswell, rather,  
word by telephone—  
How the deuce he made connections I  
as yet don't understand,  
But the word came o'er the wires in a  
deep profundo tone,  
“ We've a meeting at the House-boat—  
would you like to be on hand ?”

I had answered, “ Would I ? Rather !  
What's to be the style of night ?  
Story-tellers, or the poets, or a chafing-  
dish instead ?”  
“ 'Tis a meeting of the prophets,” he re-  
plied, “ of prophets bright,  
Who will tell us what is coming in the  
centuries ahead.

**A STYGIAN PROPHECY**

“Old Isaiah has a notion that there’s  
lots of fun to come,  
And Cassandra has a poem that we’re  
going to let her read;  
Jeremiah’s got a paper that will strike  
you mortals dumb  
With a vision of the future that we  
think you’d better heed.”

Who would not be interested in an  
evening of that kind ?  
Who would not receive a warning of the  
future if he could ?  
Who would lose a chance like this one  
to improve his narrow mind,  
In despite of all the terrors of that hor-  
rorific wood ?

So I jumped aboard the cable and I rode  
for many a mile,  
And I stuck to it right sternly till I  
reached the hither bank  
Of the unpellucid river where the people  
seldom smile,  
Of the river that of rivers is the fumidest  
and dank.

Then at last, with much of hailing, boat-  
man Charon reached the pier  
On a sort of combination of canal-boat  
and a yacht,  
And I asked him what his fare was, and  
he scratched his ancient ear  
As he answered to my question, "I  
dunno, sir, whatcher got?"

**A STYGLIAN PROPHECY**

And I beg you'll understand me when I  
say that he said that—  
'Tis a rather free translation of the  
words that he did speak;  
For we know of course that Charon in  
such English isn't pat,  
And his only known vernacular is plain  
Homeric Greek.

Furthermore it must be stated in behalf  
of Charon's self,  
Lest I seem to give the notion that the  
chap was full of tricks,  
There's a tariff down in Hades that ex-  
cludes all foreign pelf  
And there's never been a mortal got his  
money o'er the Styx.



They may take an arrant pauper on that  
other mystic shore,  
They may take a lot of folks in who like  
Turpin shone for stealth ;  
But they've built a Chinese wall there  
that contains no single door  
To admit an aristocracy that's founded  
on mere wealth.

When I'd answered that I'd nothing  
Captain Charon arched his brows—  
“Then I fear I cannot take you,” he  
replied and turned away ;  
“I'm not in the ferry business for the  
fun of running scows,  
And unless you'd like to swim it I'm  
afraid you'll have to stay.”

Then a voice came o'er the river broad  
and deep—a triple base,  
Through a Megaphone arrangement  
bringing out each single note :  
“Stop your jewing !—row him over,  
'less you want to lose your place.  
He's to be our guest this evening at the  
meeting on our boat.”

“Very well, Sir Walter Raleigh,” answered Charon turning pale ;  
“I was not aware this person was a  
friend of yours, My Lord.  
I will break the record with him if it  
takes a ripping gale.”  
And he turned and said urbanely,  
“Please step lively—all aboard.”

In just twenty-seven seconds I was on  
the other bank ;  
The Committee of Arrangements met me  
on the landing stage—  
Knightly Raleigh, Mr. Barnum, princely  
Hamlet, tall and lank,  
Shem and Samson, Dr. Johnson and  
Diogenes the sage.

And by these I was escorted to the  
House-boat on the Styx,  
Where the shades of every time and  
clime were gathered in great force,  
Where they sat about in camp-chairs,  
an anachronistic mix  
That split up one's cerebellum like a case  
of real remorse.

**A STYGLAN PROPHECY**

Once arrived the function started, Dr.  
Johnson in the chair,  
And he spoke some words of wisdom,  
most of which I have forgot ;  
Then they brought out Jeremiah and he  
tore his flowing hair  
As he let us have a future that was boil-  
ing pretty hot.

There was nothing that was worthy,  
there was nothing that was good ;  
There was nothing in the future that  
held anything but woe ;  
'Twas an outlook dark and murky as a  
vast primeval wood ;  
And the things we mortals meant for  
cake were certain to be dough.

There would be no art or letters ; hand-  
made verse would not be style ;  
And the novels of the future would be  
writ by syndicates ;  
All the art that men would worship, in  
a very little while  
Would be fashioned by mechanics with  
a store of stencil plates.

There would be no art of cooking, every  
man who wished to dine  
In the future would be fed by table  
d'hotes made up in pills ;  
Every man who wanted comfort and  
for luxury did pine  
As we know it, would find nothing that  
could mitigate his ills.

I'll not bore you with the paper in its  
pessimistic length.  
It was quite like Jeremiah from begin-  
ning to its close ;  
It was full of lamentation, and he wept  
with so much strength  
That he nearly swamped the house-boat  
with the tears that swept his nose.

But of course when he had finished he  
received a stunning cheer,  
And the spirits all applauded as of  
course they had to do,  
As old Jerry left the dais with a smile  
from ear to ear,  
With the mild ejaculation "Well, I'm  
mighty glad I'm through."

Then the Doctor spoke more wisdom  
for an hour and a half,  
While the company all chatted in a very  
genial way ;  
When uprose the sweet Isaiah with a  
happy sort of laugh,  
And he cast a horoscope that turned old  
Jeremiah gray.

It was different from the other in a very  
deep-set sense ;  
For instead of "sanguinary" it was  
"sanguinistic" quite.  
All the future would be larksome, all  
our joys would be intense,  
And the world would banish darkness  
and would find its sorrows light.

A STYGLIAN PROPHECY

Roses sweet would bloom in winter,  
and the grass would e'er be green  
In the face of deadly blizzards and de-  
spite the chilling frost ;  
And a smile upon the faces of all people  
would be seen  
In a time when not a joy in life by any  
would be lost.

There would be no sore temptations  
and nobody would be sad,  
Not a soul would suffer from his woes,  
no one infringe the laws.  
All the world would take its lexicons  
and obsolete the bad,  
And no man would be a debtor, for we'd  
all be creditors.



All his views were optimistic—and he  
had a deal of wit,  
And he had a knack about him that I  
envied—yes I did ;  
For his humor was appealing, and it al-  
ways seemed to fit—  
He'd a sunshine in his nature of the kind  
that can't be hid !

And of course when he had finished he  
received a stunning cheer,  
All the spirits there applauded, as of  
course they had to do;  
And Isaiah left the dais with a smile from  
ear to ear,  
With the statement that “like Jerry he  
was glad 'twas over, too.”

A STYGIAN PROPHECY

After that with some misgivings, which  
he couldn't well conceal,  
Johnson introduced Cassandra "who  
was nothing," so he said,  
"But a famous old new woman who'd  
a notion to reveal  
In a poem that which to her eyes was  
visible ahead."

Then the Trojan prophetess arose with  
manner full of pride,  
And without a single tremor stood and  
looked us in the face.  
"I came here to read a poem," she ob-  
served, "but I decide  
It were better far to drop a hint to ben-  
fit the race."

“ Now I know as well as you do that  
I'm thought to be a wight  
Who has not one sixteen-thousandth of  
a right to prophesy,  
But as I have sat and listened to the  
prophecies to-night,  
It has seemed to me your prophets  
haven't got the eagle eye.

“ Jeremiah—dear old fellow !—has ob-  
served that you will find  
Everything that stands before you is  
identified with rue.  
He has had a vision darksome that unto  
my weakling mind,  
Isn't worth a half a ducat, or the breath  
of saying 'Pooh !'

“And Isaiah—charming prophet!—  
sweet Isaiah’s quite as bad,  
Though we’ve got to give him credit for  
the picture that he made ;  
It is truly much more pleasing than a  
vision sore and sad,  
But that’s where its value ceases, I am  
very much afraid.

“ I admit I’m but a woman, but I know  
a thing or two.  
I have prophesied for centuries and know  
my trade, I wis.  
But there’s one thing I must tell you  
that I think you ought to do,  
And that is to drop what will be, and  
to think of that which *is*.

“There’s no use of speculations such as  
those that we have had.  
There’s to be no change in nature in the  
coming hundred years.  
There’ll be just as much of good then in  
proportion to the bad,  
There’ll be just as much of smiling in  
proportion to the tears.

“We have kept the world agoing for a  
good long bit of time,  
And we’ve found that human nature’s  
been the same in every day.  
We have listened to forebodings from  
the seers in every clime,  
We have looked for the millennium  
that’s yet to come our way.

**A STYGIAN PROPHECY**

“And despite the evil prophets who  
have cast our horoscope  
Full of darkness and of threat'nings, full  
of trouble and of doom,  
And despite the sunny prophets who  
have filled our souls with hope  
We have found the world unchanging  
in its sunshine and its gloom.

“In the years that stand before us there  
will be no change in this—  
Unto some they'll bring all gladness,  
unto others only night ;  
Unto all will come not trouble unalloyed,  
nor purest bliss,  
As would happen if you prophets who  
have spoken tell us right.

“ So instead of reading poems as I stand  
before you now  
I advise you steer your house-boat—  
steer it with unceasing care  
Through the channel of the present, set  
her overhanging prow  
'TwiXt Charybdis optimistic and the  
Scylla of despair.

“ In conclusion let me tell you that I've  
noticed as a fact—  
And I'm getting rather aged, as I think  
you plainly see—  
That the man who guides his present  
with a modicum of tact  
Won't have any cause to worry over  
that which is to be !

“ And the man who takes his bitters as  
they come into his life  
And who in the depths of sorrow thinks  
about the good he’s had,  
I believe will find great comfort in a  
future wherein strife  
Is not much in disproportion to the  
things that make him glad.”

Now for you, my Psi U. brothers, let  
me write one other line,  
To explain if need be why I bring this  
message unto you:  
I have promised to be faithful to our  
well beloved shrine,  
And I wish to give it all that I have  
found that’s good and true.



And in my day I have found it well to  
    heed the words of her  
Who that night in distant Hades told  
    the rules which are the best  
To produce the life that's happy, which  
    will make your pulses stir  
As you realize e'en in your woes how  
    greatly you are blest !

And as fair Cassandra said to us, so say  
    I to you now ;  
When embarking on the sea of life,  
    steer with unceasing care  
Through the channel of the present,  
    keep your vessel with its prow  
'Twixt Charybdis optimistic and the  
    Scylla of despair !

# A PLEA FOR NATURALISM

WRITTEN FOR THE LITERARY EXERCISES

OF THE PSI Upsilon FRATERNITY

CONVENTION: NEW YORK

APRIL THE SEVENTH

MDCCCXCII



**T**HE day was well nigh spent; the  
noon of night  
Was soon to show the dying year its  
grave,  
And merry chimes, impatient to accord  
A welcome to the new, scarce held their  
tongues  
In decent silence until all was o'er.  
The outer world, that in the times of old

Was used to lie beneath a robe of white,  
Lay cold and still and gray—a symbol  
fit,  
A symbol of a dying child of time  
Whose course was run ; while here and  
there there peeped  
Up through the hardened crust of  
Mother Earth  
A bit of green, which seemed a promise  
sweet  
Of blest eternity ; since none shall die  
Whose dying moments are not soothed  
with hope  
That there are others on whose shoul-  
ders strong  
The burdens grown too great to bear  
shall fall,  
And falling, find their Atlas there.  
Within

The embers glowed, and by their light  
I sat,  
A watcher, sad, alone ; the coming year  
Was but a hope, the present was but  
death.

I could not join with them that feasted  
then,

For watch-night revelries bring to my  
mind

The sin of Gertrude and that Danish  
King,

When meats prepared for festival of woe  
Were set scarce cold to deck a marriage  
feast.

As was my wont I mused upon the past,  
Revolving o'er and o'er the joys and  
griefs

Of this, the year whose knell should  
soon be tolled.

A casting of accounts it was to see  
If good or ill were measured out the  
more ;  
And as I mused, I saw where Nature  
took  
All undeterred her course, life seemed  
most sweet,  
While what of woe had been therein for  
man  
Had come from acts rebellious to her  
rule.

Then suddenly, afar, across the hills  
The midnight bells began their solemn  
dirge—  
A dirge that, as its slow and measured  
tones  
Rang sadly out upon the crisp night air,

A PLEA FOR NATURALISM

Should swell into an Ave, thus to greet  
The advent of the new-born year. The  
strokes

As each one fell upon my ear I strove  
To count, when on a sudden all was still ;  
The air was scarcely vibrant with the  
sixth

When Time itself a moment seemed to  
pause.

My soul was awed ; in wonderment my  
eyes

Roved over all, and with my ears attent  
I listened for the strokes completing  
twelve ;

And as I listened then there came a  
sound

As of the voice of one of wisdom ripe  
Addressing one he loved, in whom his  
hope

Was centered—words a dying father  
might  
Have whispered to a well-beloved son.

And, as the words came, I could see two  
forms:  
Upon my right a sturdy youth there  
sat,  
Who gazed in rapt attention on the face  
Of him who spoke ; the speaker, bent  
with age,  
His patriarchal beard snow white, his  
eye,  
Which dissolution soon should glaze,  
most bright,  
Sat to the left of me—the meeting 'twas  
Of him whose work was done and that  
one who

Was now to take his place—of one who  
saw

Wherein his failures lay, and now had  
come

To point another to the path of Truth ;  
And, tremulously voiced, his words  
were these :

“This is an age of artifice, my son—  
An age wherein the artificial stands  
More honored far than that which  
Nature makes—

A lesson I have learned in bitterness.

When, one long year ago, I stood as  
you

Now stand upon the threshold of your  
time,

No one was there to indicate to me  
Where pitfalls lay, and to direct my  
thoughts



To channels which should upward lead  
mankind.

I had no mentor, boy, to give to me,  
As I now give to you, one hint of that  
Surpassing opportunity, now lost,  
To lead man back from those unstable  
heights

From which he now looks down upon  
the plain

Where Nature rests—back to her loving  
arms

Who is the mother blest of every good—  
Back from the clouds of unreality  
Into the world that breathes the living  
God.

In letters what do men to-day? They  
wield

A marvelously pretty pen ; their works  
Voluminous and graceful multiply,

Upbuilding monuments—of thought?

Ah, no!

But shafts of words in memory of Style—

Mosaics with surpassing beauty  
phrased—

But yet as hard, and cold, and void of  
truth

As any stone-depicted scene must be.

In poetry we find most tender hearts

Engaged with pretty thoughts as like  
to those

Of Shakespeare and of Milton as the  
lakes

That snuggle in the mountain fastnesses

Are like the broad and unrestrained  
sea ;

Their days are spent confining flies of  
thought

In deep and mellow amber cages till

You're conscious of the amber—not the  
fly.  
Blind worshippers of form are they—of  
form  
Man-made, and not that wondrous,  
beautiful,  
Though shapeless seeming form that  
bears the stamp  
Which shows it heaven sent—sweet  
Nature's own ;  
Of form which drives from great to little  
things,  
Destroys man's potency to move the  
heart,  
And gives instead a fleeting thrill to  
sense ;  
Of form which holds in bondage genius  
e'en,  
So that our poets, e'en the most inspired,

Seem rhymesters of the garden close  
and not

The minstrels of the hills, the wilder-  
ness,

Who sing the Anthems of the Universe.

Our novelists, when they essay the real,

Are bound to be romancers all, because

The ways of man so artificial are

They have no slightest semblance to  
that mode

Of living here which Nature would  
prescribe.

In artifice are all things reared ; by it

Are all things formed—nor matters it  
one jot

Where you may look, that most ac-  
cursed taint

Of so-called art hath sicklied o'er all  
things

With that most dreadful pallor which  
precedes  
No less a thing than death. Man cannot live  
In insincerity always ; no more  
Can aught else in the universe exist  
Which most persistent everywhere  
pursues  
That corruscating will-o'-wisp, Untruth.  
Our painters, would they be content to  
tread  
Where Nature leads, her followers  
become,  
Might take us back to those immortal  
days  
When masters were ; when it were  
heresy  
For mortal hands e'en to so much as  
hint

That Nature might do better could she  
see  
Through mortal eyes ; why, boy, but  
yesterday  
I saw a canvas by a man of fame  
Depicting scenes he never saw, effects  
Of so-called light and color which have  
come  
From nothing less than dreams induced  
by strong  
Potations in a mind diseased, malformed.  
And on their knees before this self-same  
work,  
The critics worshipped and its author  
hailed  
As one inspired—as one to whom was  
sent  
A gift divine from God on high. The  
gift

Was God's, the instrument, alas ! was  
weak.

A chosen soul intrusted with His work  
Was swerved from duty's path and  
made to lie

Prostrate before this Juggernaut of Art !  
The stage hath artifice unspeakable.

And in the mart men purchase and then  
sell

For uncoined, undiscoverable gold,  
Unplanted grains and non-existent  
shares.

'Tis found in churches—day by day we  
seem

To wander farther from the simplest  
truths ;

We're so befogged by articles of faith,  
By dogmas of the church, things  
orthodox,

That worthy spirits choose the simplest  
texts

And cover reams of paper to explain  
What should be patent to the weakest  
mind—

Not only should, but would be patent  
had

Man made one slightest effort to retain  
Their sweet simplicity, and to prevent  
The priests of Sect, of Form, of Artifice  
From weaving round about them till  
obscure

The web of Dogma, Satan's own  
device.

In life political not conscience rules;  
Expediency, artifice, holds sway,  
And nations find themselves divided on  
The problems which the plainest com-  
mon sense,



Plus honesty, could in one moment  
solve :

And they who seek our highest offices  
Must bend before machines—those  
Frankensteins

Of politics, which ever sacrifice  
The country's good to politicians' greed,  
And conscience withers 'neath ambi-  
tion's lust.

The remedy ? 'Tis Nature—that is all.  
Let Nature once again assert her power:  
Let Nature say to man, ' 'Tis mine to  
rule,

Thine to obey,' and it is done—and once  
'Tis done, man hath an ally to insure  
Complete attainment of his cherished  
ends;

And messages of God through mortals  
sent

A PLEA FOR NATURALISM

Will surer reach their destination here,  
Will surer reach the hearts of those  
whose place

In meekness 'tis to listen, not to lead.  
And ere I leave thee, boy, I beg thee  
take

The words of one who's learned the  
truth to heart.

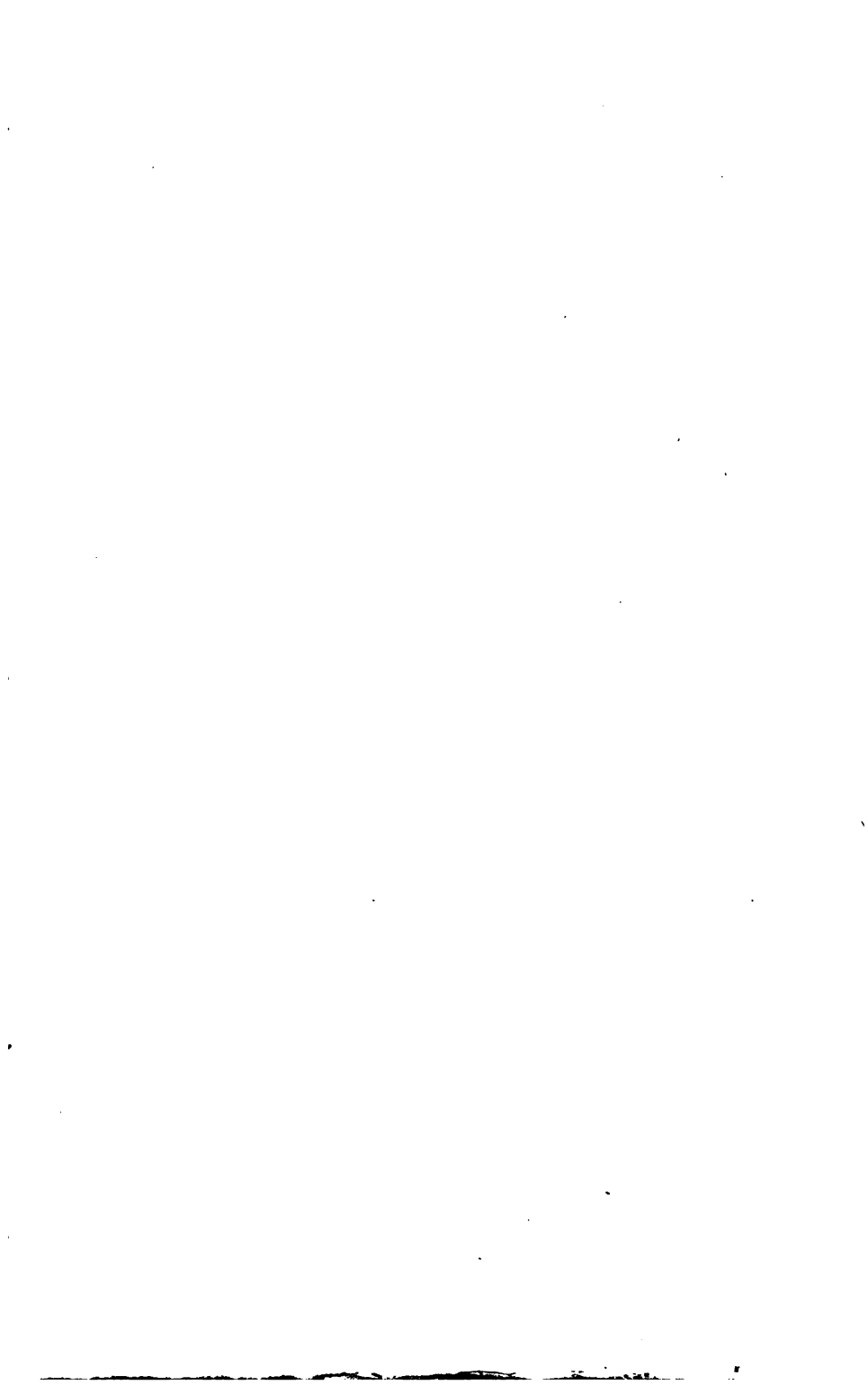
And let it be thy task to show to him  
Who follows after thee the work begun  
Of reinstating Nature on her throne;  
Of placing man where he should be—  
below,

And not above. Not this for Nature's  
sake,

But that usurping man himself may take  
That lofty place in this grand universe  
Which will be his if he but choose  
aright

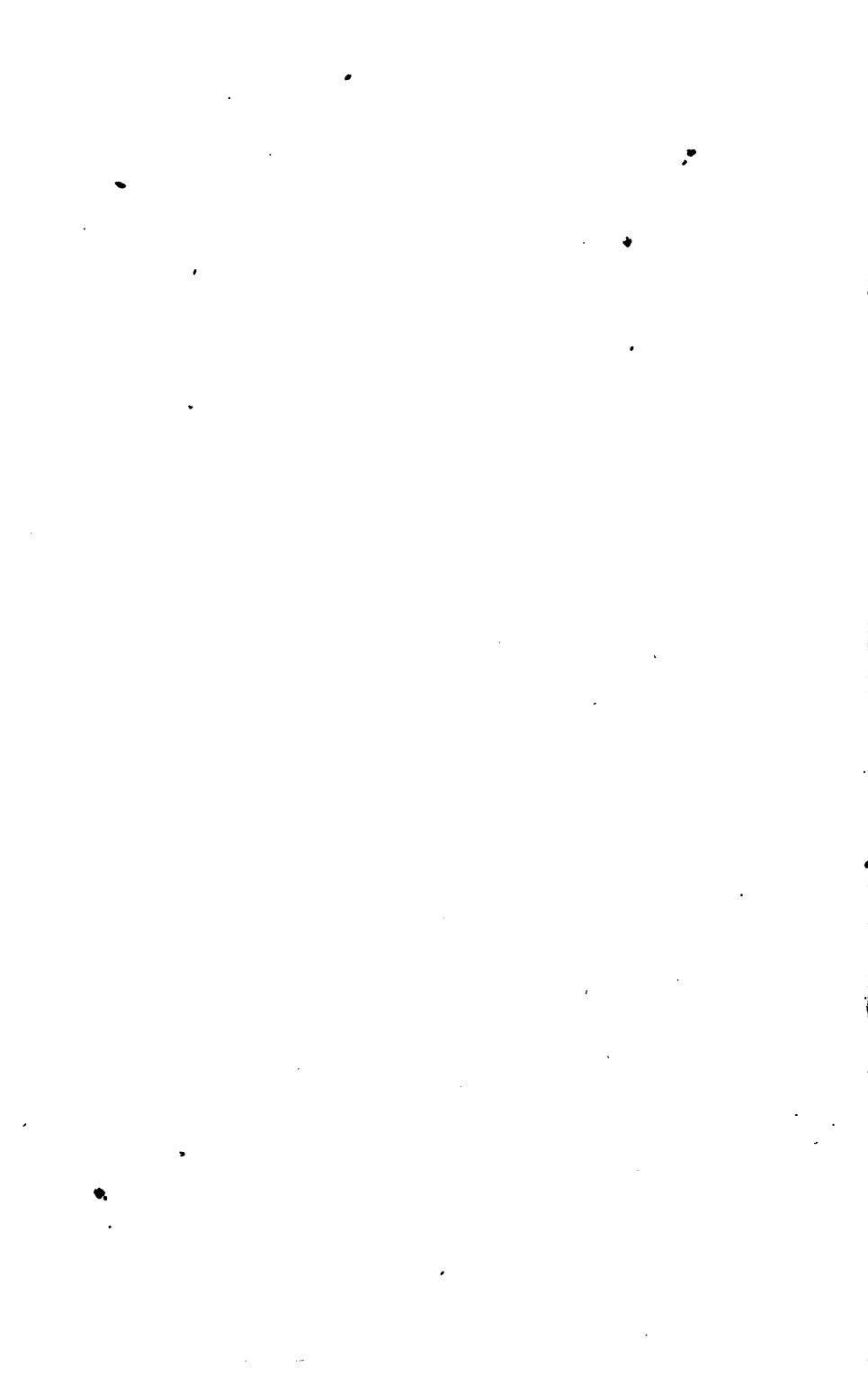
The path thereto—'neath Nature's guiding hand."

The bells, resuming, tolled the seventh stroke,  
And on the eighth the youth rose up and strode  
To where the old man sat ; then, kneeling there,  
He kissed his hand. The other sadly smiled ;  
The forehead of the youth he kissed, and as  
The last completing stroke of twelve rang out,  
Passed from my sight. Again was I alone ;  
Yet not alone, for with me rested HOPE.









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Bangs, J.K.  
A prophecy and a plea

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